

Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions Youth and Adults United for Change

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Pennsylvania Takes Giant Step Toward Protecting Children from Commercial Providers of Alcohol

Harrisburg, PA—People who sell alcohol to minors in Pennsylvania will be more likely to face the consequences of their actions under a bill that Governor Mark S. Schweiker signed on December 3 in Harrisburg.

On the final two days of the legislative session, the Pennsylvania General Assembly sent House Bill 850 to the Governor with unanimous votes in both the House and Senate. The bill fixes a loophole in the age-of-sale law for alcohol that prevented communities from checking to make sure people who sell alcohol won't sell it to anyone under 21.

“Alcohol abuse is our number one drug problem. Words cannot begin to convey the loss of innocent life and life-threatening injuries resulting from underage drinking—not to mention the suffering of families,” said Representative Paul Clymer (R-Bucks), prime sponsor of House Bill 850. Alcohol compliance checks have been used in the most of the US for years and are similar to those done in Pennsylvania for tobacco sales.

“MADD feels that this is a very simple, effective measure. If kids can't get alcohol, they won't drink alcohol!” said Rebecca Shaver, chair of the Public Policy and Enforcement Committee of Pennsylvanians Against Underage Drinking (PAUD) and executive director of MADD Pennsylvania. “We adults have to be made accountable and responsible. This wouldn't be an issue if every adult was functioning within the standards of the law.”

The minimum legal drinking age is 21 in all 50 states. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 20,043 lives since 1975. In 2000 alone, these laws saved 922 lives nationwide.

The State Senate found the need for alcohol compliance checks so compelling that they passed House Bill 850 by a vote of 49 to 0. Senator James J. Rhoades (R-Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Schuylkill), an avid supporter of PAUD and MADD, was instrumental in getting House Bill 850 considered by the state Senate before the end of session. Rhoades penned a letter citing the importance of the bill while redoubling his efforts to gain support among his colleagues for the legislation.

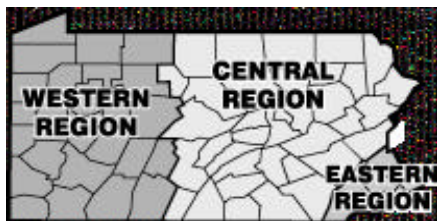
The Pennsylvania State Police will be responsible for overseeing alcohol compliance checks when the law becomes effective in February 2003.

Too often, kids are held accountable for underage drinking, but the adults who provided them with the alcohol are not held accountable at all. "Seeing the consequences adults face from breaking underage drinking laws is sure to sway minors from breaking the laws themselves," said Jacqueline Hackett, PAUD Youth Representative from Souderton in Montgomery County. "Over the last few years that Pennsylvania has carried out tobacco compliance checks, youth smoking has decreased among teenagers around me. The same results are sure to come with the passing of alcohol compliance checks."

In September, Hackett was one of 600 students who attended the Second Annual Pennsylvanians Against Underage Drinking's Youth Rally Day at the Capitol. The students talked with legislators about various approaches to reducing underage drinking, including compliance checks. Another student who visited the Capitol that day was Bob Kaiser. "I am absolutely thrilled that the bill for compliance checks was passed," said Kaiser, PAUD Youth Representative from Lawrence Park in Erie County. "Thank you SO MUCH Governor Schweiker for signing this bill; you made the right choice!"

In the past several years, teenagers from across the state have been talking regularly with their legislators. In 2000 another proposal to reduce underage drinking became law.

"Two years ago, the state strengthened the Responsible Alcohol Management Program (RAMP). This training helps licensees and their employees identify minors and fake ID's," said Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board Chairman Jonathan H. Newman. "Compliance checks will not penalize law abiding business owners. Instead it will make business owners even more diligent about their carding or ID checking process." For RAMP information, contact the regional coordinator at [telephone # from map below].



Responsible Alcohol Management Program

Western Region: 724-230-0640
724-337-4166

Central Region: 570-467-0471

Eastern Region: 610-940-1216

Pennsylvanians Against Underage Drinking (PAUD) is a statewide coalition of youth and adults, individuals and organizations working together to reduce underage drinking. In 1997, PAUD members researched dozens of public policies aimed at reducing youth access to alcohol looking for those that could do the most to protect Pennsylvania's youth. Alcohol compliance checks was one of the top two selected. The other is beer keg tagging, which has been introduced in the legislature but has never emerged from the committees to which it was assigned.

Provisions of House Bill 850

1. Allows individuals who are 18, 19 and 20 to attempt to purchase, possess or transport alcohol when acting under supervision of a law enforcement officer who is 21 or older.
2. Individual must be an officer, employee or intern of the Pennsylvania State Police Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement (LCE).
3. Individual must complete training specified by LCE.
4. Individuals under 21 may not consume alcohol, must be acting within the scope of their duties and must be under the supervision of an LCE officer who is an adult.
5. The Pennsylvania State Police must have regulations for compliance checks and their employees must follow them, including training, procedures for notifying licensees who pass the compliance check in writing and procedures for notifying licensees who fail the compliance check both verbally and immediately and in writing within ten working days.
6. Allows adult officers to work with minors as described above to conduct compliance checks when acting within the scope of their duties.

To download PDFs of print public service announcements, go to www.AlcoholFreeYouth.org. Click on "About PAUD" for the link to the PSAs.

Everyone knew the bar where kids were being served.
But after the fatal crash, no one wanted to admit it.

IT'S ILLEGAL IN PENNSYLVANIA FOR ANYONE UNDER 21 TO DRINK AND AGAINST THE LAW FOR ANYONE TO GIVE OR SELL ALCOHOL TO MINORS. WHY LET KIDS THROW AWAY THEIR LIVES OVER UNDERAGE DRINKING?

To report underage drinking, call toll-free: **1-888-UNDER-21**

Pennsylvanians Against Underage Drinking
alcoholfreeyouth.org